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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2008

In Today's Papers

AKP Plans for Averting Closure Case

All papers report the ruling AKP is working on constitutional changes in an effort to make party closures difficult. According to the new regulations planned by the AKP, a party involved in "unconstitutional activities" will be warned by the prosecutor. If the warning is ignored, a closure suit could be filed. Party officials will be held responsible individually for "activities against secularism and the republic," which will relieve parties from punishment for such acts. Parties will face charges only if they refuse to expel members involved in illegal activities. The parliament's approval will be needed for the chief prosecutor to file a suit for the disbanding of a party. Mainstream Vatan says AKP has dropped plans to change the structure of the Constitutional Court.

AKP has submitted to MHP its proposal for legal reforms. If the MHP declines to support the reforms, AKP will submit the issue to the parliament next week and will pass the reforms in the first half of April. Papers don't expect the MHP to support the proposal since the changes will relieve not only the AKP but also the pro-Kurdish DTP, which also faces a closure case. Liberal Radikal believes the reforms might not help block the suit for the closure of AKP since the legal process has already started.

Opposition CHP plans to apply to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of constitutional reforms related to the banning of political parties. CHP leader Deniz Baykal said, "The AKP is creating its own justice; it will turn the constitution into a dress that will fit its own body." Baykal warned against political attempts for altering the main pillars of the system and the constitutional order to their own ends. "The AKP is accused of violating the constitution. The situation in Turkey is different than Europe. Religious exploitation would turn everything upside down in politics. This sensitivity was reflected in the

constitution when the Republic was founded," said Baykal.

Law Faculties, High Court Chief Support Prosecutor Yalcinkaya
All papers report the deans of 26 law faculties have released a joint statement saying prosecutors were not parties in the lawsuits they file, and that prosecutors couldn't be criticized for fulfilling their responsibilities. The deans stressed "the judiciary should be protected in order to protect the state."

Court of Appeals chairman Hasan Gerceker has also extended support to chief prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya. Gerceker warned the AKP to consider the effect of their statements, and to think before they speak up. "Instead of politicizing law, politicians should abide by laws. There is no democracy if there is no law," stressed Gerceker, who called on all to act with common sense.

VP Cheney Urged NATO for more Troops to Afghanistan
Sabah, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Aksam and others: Tabloid Aksam's headline reads "Cheney Looked for a Suitable Place for Turkish Troops in Afghanistan," and the article reports Vice President Cheney included Afghanistan in his program at the last minute. The Turkish press predicts that Cheney will insist on additional Turkish combat troops to Afghanistan to fight against the Taliban. Mainstream Hurriyet reports that Cheney is expected to ask Ankara to send additional troops to Afghanistan during his visit to Ankara on Monday. The issue raises the question of whether or not parliamentary authorization will be required if the government responds this request positively. MFA sources said that the 2001 motion would be sufficient, but added that the last word would be with the Turkish General Staff. Mainstream Sabah reports that the U.S. security officials arriving in Ankara prior to the visit of the Vice President insisted on placing snipers on the rooftops, but

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Turkish security rejected the proposal by saying the Turkish National Police will provide security. The paper adds that the Chief of General Staff, General Buyukanit delayed his plans to visit northern Cyprus in order to meet with VP Cheney. Mainstream Hurriyet writes, "America will want NATO allies to give more powerful support for Afghanistan," and, "Cheney has begun to lobby NATO allies to send more combat troops as the upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest approaches." Islamist-oriented Zaman writes in "We Will Pressure NATO for More Soldiers in Afghanistan," that VP Cheney, "made a surprise visit to Afghanistan as he wanted to make a joint demand, with Afghan President Karzai, for more NATO support in Afghanistan." Liberal Radikal columnist Murat Yetkin notes, "Cheney never visits a country empty-handed. What does he have up his sleeve? Missile defense against Russia? An energy agreement between Turkey and Iraq? PKK? Demands for combat troops in Afghanistan?"

Shocking Developments in Hrant Dink Murder Case
All papers: Mainstream Hurriyet, Sabah and Milliyet report Okan Simsek and Veysel Sahin, two gendarmerie officers accused of negligence in the murder of Hrant Dink, denied their earlier testimony and said "we testified like that because our superiors ordered us to do so. The fact is, we received a tip-off about the assassination and passed the information to our superiors, however, they did not respond to the threat." The Court decided to invite the relevant officers to the court to testify and postponed the case to June 19, Hurriyet adds.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq

"Fifth Anniversary of Occupation"
Ferai Tinc wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (3/21): "Even though this year marks the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, let's not forget the U.S. has been involved in Iraq since 1990. This is part of America's ongoing struggle to reshape the Middle East in the aftermath of Soviet Union's demise. The U.S., as the only world superpower, wields too much strength. Prior to the Iraq war, for instance, there were many who believed the U.S. was capable of finishing the job in Iraq promptly. However, all such predictions were proven wrong. In fact, the situation in Iraq is so bad that it needs no interpretation. The U.S. occupation paved the way for radical religious movements and terrorist organizations to take

control in Iraq. Of all Iraqis, only the Kurds are grateful for the U.S. One of the main purposes of VP Cheney's visit to Erbil was to ask the Regional Administration's support for oil sharing, because the U.S. cannot ensure Iraqi oil sharing. According to Bush, American forces achieved an undeniable success in Iraq and the war will end with victory. I wonder if there is anyone who buys this rhetoric."

"The Demolishing of Iraq"

Derya Sazak wrote in mainstream Milliyet (3/21): "The Bush administration planned the Iraq invasion after 9/11. Their lies concerning weapons of mass destruction were part of this planning. Even U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told lies about weapons of mass destruction. As if this was not enough, another lie was told when the Bush administration linked Saddam's regime to al-Qaeda. Once all of these lies were proven false, the new rhetoric morphed into "protecting the safety of energy routes." The price of oil per barrel was below \$30 before the Iraq war; since then, the price has climbed to an astounding price of \$110 dollars per barrel. While President Bush estimates the cost of the war at \$500 Billion, other projections say the war has taken a \$3 trillion toll on the U.S. economy. Moreover, Iraq is experiencing another tragedy. Before the war, a secular regime was in place in Iraq. Now, thanks to the 'democracy and freedoms' provided by the U.S., Islamic Fundamentalists are taking over."

TV News:
NTV

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Domestic News

- The parliament has rejected the opposition CHP's proposal for holding general debates on the recent Turkish cross-border operations into northern Iraq.
- Pro-Kurdish DTP leader Nurettin Demirtas, former lawmaker Selim Sadak and Dicle Mayor Abdullah Akengin face trial for making terror propaganda.
- A survey by Turkey's Central Bank expects the year-end inflation to stand at 7.27 percent.

International News

- U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney met Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai during an unannounced visit to the country.
- Armenian authorities plan to lift the state of emergency in Yerevan.
- Russia is preparing to host a Middle East peace conference this year that will try to re-launch talks between Israel and Syria about the occupied Golan Heights.

WILSON